

VZCZCXYZ5727
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHFR #0403 0651633
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 051633Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2172
INFO RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 1462
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1636
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2642
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 6055
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 6619
RUEHLE/AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG 0389
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1486

UNCLAS PARIS 000403

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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [SCUL](#) [TBIO](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)

SUBJECT: MAKING THE KOREAN DMZ A WORLD HERITAGE SITE

¶1. The Belgian Embassy assembled United States, Canadian, Australian, Luxembourg, and South Korean diplomats March 3 to listen to a proposal by Baron Simon-Pierre Nothomb, head of Belgium's association of Korean War Veterans. Nothomb suggested that a fitting memorial to the Korean War dead would be to make the current DMZ a World Heritage site. Untouched by the hand of man for almost sixty years, the DMZ has become a unique natural wilderness.

¶2. A representative of UNESCO's World Heritage Center reported that he had visited the DMZ in 2004 and could testify to the uniqueness of the site. In his view it could easily qualify as a World Heritage site both because of its historic significance and because of the importance as a nearly pristine biosphere.

¶3. The World Heritage official reported that UNESCO had attempted to open a dialogue with the two Koreas in 2004 and 2005 on preservation of the DMZ. The North Korean delegation at the time had reported that this was a matter for the North Korean defense ministry and said it would have to refer the matter to Pyongyang. Nothing more was heard of the matter. The South Korean Deputy Permanent Representative commented that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea UNESCO delegation is staffed by officials of the culture ministry. They are probably not even allowed to talk to the defense ministry, he suggested.

¶4. Discussion then focused on how to advance the matter, with Baron Nothomb noting that war veterans are aging rapidly and need action soon if it is to happen in their lifetime. He wondered whether it would be possible to approach China to have it press North Korea. There must be Chinese veterans groups, he suggested. The Belgian ambassador reported that he had discussed the matter with the Chinese ambassador to UNESCO and had been surprised when she denied that there were any such groups in China. The Canadian ambassador warned Baron Nothomb against using the verb "pressure." The North Koreans don't like to be pressured, and they would surely oppose the initiative reflexively if they felt they were being squeezed to support it. The Canadian suggested that the real task is to make the North Koreans think that this is partly their idea. The South Korean undertook to report the approach but warned that the North Koreans can be difficult to deal with and still try to undermine the legitimacy of South Korea. The U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative stressed that this is a matter for the two Koreas to decide.

¶5. Comment: Under UNESCO rules, North and South Korea would have to request jointly that the site be inscribed on the World Heritage list. While we are not experts on the Korean situation, we would expect this to be a high hurdle. No third party could act if the two Koreas are not interested in the idea. We report this exchange because we left the meeting under the impression that Baron Nothomb

intended to continue to promote his idea and to try to reach out and enlist the support of veterans' groups elsewhere.

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